

Venous Thromboembolism

Reducing The Risk in Pregnancy and After Birth

Patient Information

What is Venous Thromboembolism (VTE)?

VTE is a condition, in which a blood clot forms in a blood vessel. These most often occur in the deep vein of the leg, calf or pelvis, which is known as deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

Why is reducing the risk of VTE important?

VTE can be serious because, if left untreated, it can disrupt blood flow and cause damage to the veins and the surrounding tissues and organs. A blood clot may break free and travel in the bloodstream and become lodged in another part of the body, such as the lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolism (PE) and can be life threatening.

When you are pregnant your blood becomes stickier and can increase the chance of developing a clot. Whilst this increased risk is only small, around 1:1000, it is further increased by other factors such as your age, weight, smoking or a family history of VTE. There are other additional risk factors and your midwife or doctor will talk to you about the factors that are applicable to you.

Why have you been prescribed low molecular weight heparin (LMWH)?

You are being prescribed LMWH because it thins your blood and helps to prevent a clot from forming. Tinzaparin and Dalteparin are the LMWH products usually provided by our hospital. An individual assessment is performed on every pregnant woman and LMWH is started if you are considered at a higher risk or you are diagnosed with a VTE. You will be at the highest risk of developing a VTE within the first few weeks after your baby is born, so you must keep administering the LMWH as prescribed by your doctor.

Please make sure that you complete the course as prescribed. Missed doses or stopping treatment earlier may increase your risk of a blood clot forming.

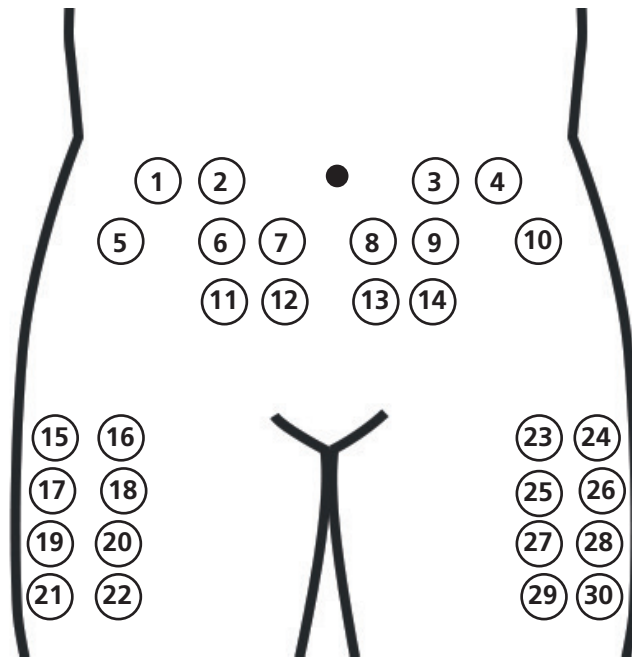
Your midwife or doctor will ask you if you are administering your medication as prescribed. This is to support you and address any problems or concerns you may have.

How do I administer LMWH?

LMWH is a very small injection. You will be shown how to administer this by your midwife. However this leaflet also provides you with instructions.

Places you can give the injection:

Imagine a U shaped area around your belly button (it is safe to administer on your abdomen whilst pregnant). You can also administer to the upper outer side of your thigh and the upper outer side of your buttock. It is advised that you inject yourself at the same time each day.



Step 1: Wash your hands and make sure the area you are going to give the injection is clean. **Be sure you inject yourself in a different area every day.** You can use the picture for guidance and rotate where you administer your injection.

If you have had a caesarean section, please avoid injecting too close to your wound.

Step 2: Open the pack and remove the syringe. Make sure it is clear and nothing is floating within the syringe. Do not press the plunger to remove air bubbles as you may lose some of the medicine and therefore not receive the entire dose.

Step 3: Make sure you are injecting into fatty tissue. To do this, pinch a fold of skin between your fingers and thumb of one hand. You may find it easier to inject whilst sitting.

Step 4: Hold the syringe with your other hand. Insert the entire needle into the fold of your skin at a 45° to 90° angle and press the plunger slowly until the entire dose of LMWH has been administered.

Step 5: Remove the needle while letting go of the fold of the skin. Dispose the entire syringe into the yellow sharps box that has been provided. Wash your hands.

How to store your LMWH

Please keep the syringes in the pack until it is time to administer them. Keep the pack in a cool, dry place, at room temperature. **Please keep your pack and the yellow sharps box out of the reach of children.**

Side effects

Side effects are usually minor. The most common are bruising and swelling at the injection site. Hypersensitivity at the injection site is reported with the use of LMWH. This may present itself as a rash or a skin discoloration. Please seek advice from your midwife. Your doctor can assess and may decide to change you to a different LMWH product. Further information can be found on the leaflet found in the pack with your treatment doses.

Signs and symptoms to look out for of a VTE

Whilst you are on LMWH to reduce your risk it is important you look out for signs and symptoms. These may include:

- Throbbing or cramping pain, usually occurs in one leg in the calf or thighs
- Swelling in the affected area
- Warm skin around the painful area
- Red or darkened skin around the painful area
- Swollen veins that are hard or sore when you touch them

More severe symptoms of a PE may include:

- Sudden unexplained difficulty in breathing
- Tightness in the chest or chest pain
- Coughing up blood
- Feeling very unwell or collapsing

You should seek help immediately if you experience any of the symptoms above by attending the Emergency Department.

Diagnosing and treating a VTE reduces the risk of developing a PE. Advice on the above can be sought by contacting the Maternity Assessment Centre on 01274 364531 / 364532.

If you have any symptoms of a PE call 999 for immediate medical attention.

Treatment just prior to your baby's birth

If you think you are going into labour or your waters have broken, do not administer any more injections. Phone your maternity unit on the above number and tell them that you are on LMWH treatment. They will advise you on what to do next. You may be invited to attend for assessment. The timing of your last LMWH injection can affect whether or not you can have an epidural.

If you have any concerns, please discuss with your midwife who will be able to advise you. If you are having a planned caesarean section or induction of labour, you will be advised when to take your last dose.

Frequently asked questions

What else can I do to reduce the risk of developing a VTE?

- Stay as active as you can in pregnancy and be as mobile as possible following the birth of your baby
- Wear special stockings (graduated elastic compression stockings) to help prevent blood clots. You can be measured for these whilst you are in hospital
- Keep hydrated by drinking at least 6-8 cups of water a day
- Stop smoking
- Lose weight before pregnancy if you are overweight
- Avoid excessive weight gain in pregnancy

Is it safe to give myself LMWH whilst pregnant?

Yes, LMWH is commonly used in pregnancy. LMWH does not cross the placenta to your baby.

Is it safe to breastfeed while on LMWH?

Yes, it is safe to breastfeed whilst taking LMWH. Only very low levels of LMWH are found in breast milk and your baby will not absorb it from their gut.

Does LMWH affect other medications?

Yes, it can do and so it is important that you tell your doctor all the other medications that you are taking. It is also important to tell any health professional when they are treating you if you are taking LMWH.

Can I travel whilst taking LMWH?

If you have to travel long distance, it is important that you drink plenty of fluids and walk around for a few minutes every hour. You should also wear the elasticated support stockings throughout the journey. Make sure you have enough medication with you for the time you will be away. Your doctor can provide you with a letter to explain that you need to carry your injections onto a plane.

What do I do if I miss an injection?

Give yourself your injection as soon as you remember and note the time. This will now become the new time to give your next injection, which will be after 24 hours.

What is the risk for my next pregnancy?

If you have had a VTE at any time, the risk is high in your next pregnancy and you will need to be treated with LMWH again. If you have not had a VTE but have other risk factors, you may be able to change some of them, for example by stopping smoking or losing weight before your next pregnancy, which may change your risk. It is important to realise that not all risk factors can be changed, such as age or parity (number of babies you have had) so LMWH treatment may still be recommended.

People with hearing and speech difficulties

You can contact us using the Relay UK app. Textphone users will need to dial 18001 before the number to be contacted.

Accessible Information

If you need this information in another format or language, please ask a member of staff.

Smoking

Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is a smoke-free organisation. You are not permitted to smoke or use e-cigarettes in any of the hospital buildings or grounds.